

VZCZCXRO1872

OO RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHFR #1595/01 1101127
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 201127Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6639
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHMRE/AMCONSUL MARSEILLE PRIORITY 1676
RUEHSR/AMCONSUL STRASBOURG PRIORITY 0404
RUEHC/DEPARTMENT OF LABOR WASHDC
RUCPDO/DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 001595

SIPDIS

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPT ALSO FOR EUR/WE, DRL/IL, INR/EUC, EUR/ERA, EUR/PPD,
AND EB
DEPT OF COMMERCE FOR ITA
DEPT OF LABOR FOR ILAB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [EU](#) [FR](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION EVE: BETWEEN SARKOZY AND ROYAL

REF: A. (A) PARIS 1566

- [1](#)B. (B) PARIS 1491 AND PREVIOUS
- [1](#)C. (C) EMBASSY PARIS DAILY SIPRNET REPORT FOR
20APR07 AND PREVIOUS

PARIS 00001595 001.2 OF 003

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. Please treat accordingly.

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In the final days before the April 22 first round of the French presidential election, the latest polls continue to predict that center-right UMP candidate Nicolas Sarkozy, followed by Socialist Party candidate Segolene Royal, will be the two victors for the May 7 run-off. Centrist UDF candidate Francois Bayrou and right-wing extremist Jean-Marie Le Pen are still placed third and fourth. The well-respected SOFRES polling firm's latest sounding of opinion taken April 16-17 puts Sarkozy at 28.5 percent of first-round voter intentions, Royal at 25 percent, Bayrou at 19 percent and Le Pen at 14 percent. This one-two-three-four relative standing in the polls has not changed since mid-February, when Bayrou surged past Le Pen. That said, each of France's seven presidential elections so far has had its "surprise," usually a reversal of fortune for a leader in the polls. The most likely "surprise" outcome for Sunday, according to polling reports, is a reversal of the order of the first two candidates. A first-place finish for Royal -- or even a very close second-place finish -- could dramatically change the dynamic, and the momentum going into the second round. The probability of centrist Bayrou qualifying for the second round appears to have diminished significantly in recent days.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY CONT'D: France's eighth election of a president by universal suffrage has a number of distinguishing features. The leading candidates represent a change of generation. Both Royal and Sarkozy have challenged the status quo in their parties and in France. Royal is France's first serious female presidential candidate. One of the leading candidates -- Sarkozy -- is a polarizing figure, as feared as he is respected. The political context is characterized by a shifting to the right of the political mainstream. Sunday's outcome seems fairly clear, setting up a likely very close secondround, with Royal and Sarkozy

pulling out all the stops between April 22 and May 6. END
SUMMARY.

THE LINE-UP IN LATEST POLLS

13. (U) As France enters the final days of the first-round presidential campaign, polling data suggests that center-right UMP candidate Nicolas Sarkozy is still on track to win on April 22, with Segolene Royal likely to place second. The well-respected SOFRES polling firm's latest sounding of opinion taken April 16 -17 puts Sarkozy at 28.5 percent of first-round voter intentions, Socialist Party candidate Segolene Royal at 25 percent, centrist UDF party candidate Bayrou at 19 percent, and right-wing extremist Jean-Marie Le Pen at 14 percent. Two other leading polls also taken earlier this week -- by the BVA and IPSOS firms -- reflect the same line-up with the following percentages: Sarkozy, 29 and 30; Royal, 25 and 23.5; Bayrou, 15 and 18.5; and Le Pen, 13 and 13. Bayrou clearly remains the wild card; some polls show him going up, others going down. For Bayrou to finish second, he would need to capture a large, probably unattainable, majority of the undecideds.

BUT LOTS OF UNCERTAINTY

14. (SBU) Given the notorious unreliability of French voters, many nonetheless continue to believe that France's 8th presidential election, like nearly all preceding ones, still holds a possible surprise. In the very first election in 1965, General De Gaulle was "humiliatingly" forced into a run-off by Socialist Francois Mitterrand when he unexpectedly failed to obtain 50 percent of the vote in the first round. In the most recent presidential election, in 2002, Socialist PM Lionel Jospin was unexpectedly eliminated by Le Pen. This year's election features a number of "uncertainty factors" that could still affect the outcome:

THE SARKOZY FACTOR

PARIS 00001595 002.4 OF 003

15. (SBU) Sarkozy has emphasized issues such as immigration and opposition to Turkey's membership in the EU in an effort to draw Le Pen voters into the political mainstream. At the same time, Bayrou has taken away political space in the center. Sarkozy's strategy is consistent with the general view that the French electorate overall has itself moved to the right, but it also represents an attempt to deprive the far-right of its oxygen (much along the lines of Mitterrand's strategy vis-a-vis the Communists). The shift itself, as well as Sarkozy's pugnacious and hyperkinetic personality, has served to limit his appeal despite an overall appreciation of his competence. If, in addition, far-right voters choose in the end to stay with Le Pen rather than vote for Sarkozy, Sarkozy's score in the first round would be insufficient to give him the strong first-place finish he seeks in order to build momentum going into the second round.

THE ROYAL CALCULUS

16. (SBU) Royal has focused increasingly in the last week on the symbolism of electing a female president as well as the necessity of unifying the left in order to avoid a repeat of the 2002 first-round defeat of her party. She has attempted to appeal to the center enough to win votes away from Bayrou and has highlighted Sarkozy's scariness in order to mobilize the left behind her as the only way to stop Sarkozy. Fear of Sarkozy serves also as a justification for drawing away potential Bayrou voters who may support Bayrou's centrist views but believe he cannot ultimately win. Moreover, French voters can choose change simply by voting for a woman. Royal's strategy appears to be paying off in the last days of the campaign, to the point where it is possible that she could still surprise everyone and come in first place in the first round. Even if she ultimately places only second to Sarkozy, if she succeeds in closing the gap substantially

between them, she could enter the second round as the candidate with momentum.

BAYROU THE SPOILER?

17. (SBU) Bayrou has continued to pound the left and the right, but in a manner aimed at increasing his attractiveness primarily to those uncomfortable with Sarkozy. On the one hand, he genuinely appeals to those who are tired of left-right gridlock and are seeking a "third way" for dealing with France's challenges. A number of analysts continue to insist that Bayrou still has a chance of edging out Royal and getting into the second round if he should surge in the 48 hours preceding April 22. But we see this as highly unlikely. A key element in Bayrou's appeal was that he, not Royal, could defeat Sarkozy. As Royal's fortunes have improved, and his standing declined, the "anyone but Sarkozy" rationale may be moving back in her direction.

A DIFFERENT ELECTION

18. (SBU) This may not be the watershed election it was originally billed as, but it does have some distinguishing features. For the first time, a woman has a clear chance to become president. (It is not clear whether Royal's gender will ultimately work for or against her.) One of the candidates is a polarizing figure; indeed, Sarkozy in effect has become the theme of the election. Both Sarkozy and Royal represent a new generation of leaders. Both can be seen as rebels in their own camps, shaking up the status quo. On the other hand, specific foreign policy issues, including how to relaunch Europe following France's 2005 rejection of the EU constitutional treaty or relations with the U.S., have not featured prominently.

19. (SBU) We will only know in retrospect what this election really was about, and the first-round results could take on new significance two weeks later when the French have made their choice between the two finalists. For now, we are looking at a Sunday election result that will likely set up a classic left-right confrontation, but with very non-classic, next-generation candidates. The order in which these candidates -- Nicholas Sarkozy and Segolene Royal -- finish, and the relative strength of their showings, will have a

PARIS 00001595 003.2 OF 003

strong impact on the election of France's next president on May 6.

Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

STAPLETON